DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 144 EA 030 448

AUTHOR Sheppard, Bruce; Brown, Jean
TITLE Pulling Together or Apart: Factors Influencing a School's Ability To Learn.
PUB DATE 2000-04-00
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Instructional Improvement; *Learning Activities; *Nontraditional Education; Organizational Development; *Organizational Objectives; Public Schools; *Team Teaching; Teamwork
IDENTIFIERS *Canada

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a case study of an alternative school for young offenders. It describes the efforts of organizational members to bring about improvement by facilitating organizational learning. The case study builds on current research related to organizational learning and team leadership in educational settings and attempts to answer the following questions: (1) What processes and factors influence organizational learning? and (2) How does a leadership approach influence organizational learning? The paper reports the findings of a 2-year case study of an alternative school that houses 30-35 students between the ages of 12-16 years. Data sources consist of interviews, surveys, document analysis, field notes, and feedback from members of a leadership team. Results point out several factors that facilitate organizational learning, the strongest of which is the existence of an organizational learning leadership (OLL) team whose primary function is to promote organizational learning. The research also demonstrates the difficulty of changing the existing culture of leadership at the school. The alternative school learned through positive factors such as the OLL team, action research, individual learning, and distributed leadership. (Contains 38 references.) (DFR)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 443 144

# Pulling Together or Apart: Factors Influencing a School's Ability to Learn

by

**Dr. Bruce Sheppard**
Associate Professor & Associate Dean
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NF
A1B 3X8
bsheppar@stemnet.nf.ca

&

**Dr. Jean Brown**
Associate Professor
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NF
A1B 3X8
jbrown@morgan.ucs.mun.ca

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
New Orleans, LA

April 2000

EA030448

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
B. Sheppard
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This paper is a report of a case study of an alternative school for young offenders. It describes the efforts of organizational members as they attempt to bring about improvement by engaging in a formal process to facilitate organizational learning. This study builds on current research related to organizational learning and team leadership in educational settings (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Leithwood, Steinbach, Ryan, & Jantzi, 1997), and in particular attempts to answer the following two questions: (1) What processes and factors influence organizational learning? (2) How does leadership approach influence organizational learning?

## Organizational Learning

For the purposes of this study, we have accepted the definition of organizational learning put forward by DiBella, Nevis, and Gould (1996):

> We define organizational learning as the capacity (or processes) within an organization to maintain or improve performance based on experience. This activity involves knowledge acquisition (the development or creation of skills, insights, relationships), knowledge sharing (the dissemination to others of what has been acquired by some), and knowledge utilization (integration of the learning so that it is assimilated, broadly available, and can also be generated to new situations). (p. 363)

Consistent with this definition, DiBella, Nevis, and Gould (1996) contend that organizational learning occurs "by building on existing capabilities or developing new ones. The latter involves a change in culture; the former involves improving current capabilities. Organizations can enhance their learning capability through either approach" (p. 361). In this study, therefore, we identified organizational learning as learning that resulted from a purposive and deliberate intervention from within or outside the organization as well as learning that occurred naturally as the organization adapts over time (see Edmondson & Moingeon, 1996; Lant & Mezias, 1996 for additional support for this definition).

### Framework

For the past two decades, there has been a growing body of research on ways organizations learn and there have been identified multiple processes and factors that either facilitate or impede organizational learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978, 1996; Daft & Huber, 1987; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Hendry, 1996; Louis, 1994; Senge, 1990). Senge (1990) suggests that learning is enhanced if organizations engage in the five disciplines of personal mastery, team learning, mental models, shared vision, and systems thinking. Contrarily, he contends that organizations that do not focus on the development of these five disciplines have learning disabilities that inhibit learning. Similarly, Fiol & Lyles (1985) provide a list of factors that affect organizational learning: a corporate culture conducive to learning, strategies that allow flexibility, an organizational structure that allows both innovativeness and new insights, and the environment. Argyris and Schön (1978) argue that learning is inhibited when management define goals independent of others, manage the environment unilaterally, maximize winning, minimize generating or expressing negative feelings, and value

rationality at the expense of feelings. While much less specific, Hendry (1996), in like manner, proffers that certain organizational cultures exert conformity and exercise control, thereby inhibiting organizational learning.

While there is a growing literature related to organizational learning in educational environments, it remains meagre in comparison to that which exists in the general field of organizational development and leadership and the popular business literature. Louis (1994) summarizes conditions that facilitate organizational learning in schools as follows: decentralization, leadership that is closely identified as feminine, investment in research and development and dissemination of generated knowledge, the outside environment (particularly other organizations), a crisis, and a strong connection between an action and the outcome. As well, Leithwood and his colleagues have conducted considerable research in this field during the last few years. Through an analysis of three distinct, but related research projects, Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1997) found that the following conditions contributed to organizational learning: out-of-school variables (district, ministry, and community), in-school variables (vision, culture, structure, strategy, policy and resources), and leadership. When these variables were ranked across the three studies reported by the authors, the five top ranking variables were the district, school leadership, school culture, structure, and the community.

In our data collection and analysis for this research, we employed Senge's five disciplines and the top five variables ranked by Leithwood et al. as guides to developing or understandings related to organizational learning. In addition, we allowed ourselves the flexibility to adapt our inquiry and to pursue paths of discovery as they emerged (Martella, Nelson, & Marchand-Martella, 1999).

## Methodology

This paper reports the findings of a two-year case study of Pine Wood Alternative School (PWA)[1] from September 1997 to November 1999. This school is home to 30 -35 students between the ages of 12-16 years. The school employs approximately one hundred employees as follows: 10 teachers, 3 social workers, 2 nurses, 9 support workers (food services, cleaning, and secretarial), 70 youth care counsellors, 4 counsellor supervisors, an assistant administrator, an administrator. Teachers, social worker, nurses, and support workers are each represented by a divisional head. The school is under control of a division of government, referred to as headquarters by the school's employees.

Data sources included 34 interviews, 94 surveys, document analysis (policy documents, meeting minutes, program assessment reports, and an external evaluation report), field notes of participant observations of 17 team meetings, field notes of regular consultations with two key informants, and feedback from members of a leadership team on initial data analysis. We employed a participatory action research model (Whyte, Greenwood, & Lazes, 1991). This allowed us to be observer-participants in the regularly scheduled strategic leadership meetings, ensured access to all relevant

[1]A pseudonym to insure anonymity and to protect confidentiality

documents, and guaranteed high participation rates in interviews and in the completion of surveys. Our return rate on surveys was 94%, and all contacted participants agreed to be interviewed. The triangulation of all sources of data contributed to the validation of the information gathered from each source.

Data from surveys and interviews were gathered at the beginning of Year Two of this study. We selected interview participants in a manner that allowed proportional representation of the various roles and groups within the school. Among those 34 interviewees were also individuals recommended by other participants as key informants. We administered a survey to all employees. The internal consistency reliability coefficient of each survey construct ranges from .70 to .81. Both the interview protocols and survey questions were grounded in the literature related to organizational learning with specific emphasis on Senge's (1990) five disciplines and the five variables identified by Leithwood et al (1997).

A variety of analytical methods were used, including constant comparative method, theoretical memos, clustering of conceptual groupings and corresponding matrices (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). All the data from the above noted sources were coded by two researchers to insure inter rater reliability of the coding. Some codes were developed deductively on the basis of the five disciplines of the learning organization (Senge, 1990) and five variables identified by Leithwood et al. (1997). Other codes were developed inductively during the process of interviews on the basis of field notes, and yet other codes were added during the analysis as the researchers uncovered unexpected themes (Martella, Nelson, & Marchand-Martella, 1999; Potter, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). After all data had been collected, and a preliminary analysis completed, we prepared a report that we shared with the school action research team, allowing our analysis and interpretations to be corrected and verified.

## Results

### Factors that Facilitate Organizational Learning at PWA

There are several factors that facilitated organizational learning at PWA. The strongest of these factors was the existence of an organizational learning leadership (OLL) team whose primary function was to promote organizational learning. Through this team several other facilitating processes were initiated and several leaders came to the fore. As a result of the work of the OLL team, all new initiatives were subjected to an action research cycle insuring that implementation was treated as a process, rather than an event. Other facilitating factors appeared to be less direct than the OLL team and action research; nevertheless, their importance is apparent. The leadership of the assistant administrator and the professional development officer were essential to both the setup and ongoing work of the OLL team. These two individuals also led a training program and were responsible for making it a budget priority. There were several middle managers and informal leaders who contributed significantly to learning, as well. For example, the department head of teaching at the school introduced other department heads and the

administration to the concept of the learning organization. Also, one of the local union representatives was quite influential and he was supportive of initiatives directed at facilitating organizational learning. Finally, several internal crises, a student suicide and an employee beating, received much public attention. This attention resulted in three external reviews and organizational restructuring that provided the context and "critical tension" that facilitated an organizational recognition of the need for change. It was such a recognition that led to the setup of the OLL team. We have presented our discussion of these factors under the following headings:

- ***An Organizational Learning Leadership Team***
- ***Action Research***
- ***Crises and Mandated External Reviews***
- ***Individual Employee Learning and Distributed Leadership***

### *An Organizational Learning Leadership Team*

As noted above, the strongest factor that facilitated organizational learning was the existence of an OLL team. The assistant administrator appointed members to this team in a manner to insure the inclusion of all of the divisional heads, two union executive members, and proportional staff representation from each of the divisions throughout the school. Over the course of 24 months, team members worked at team building and willingly engaged in learning activities to improve their dialoguing skills. In spite of inhibiting factors such as lack of trust and the union-management difficulties that will be discussed below, the OLL team facilitated organizational learning. Also, as time progressed, OLL team meetings became much more positive than initial meetings. The level of trust among team members improved and the various team members began to feel valued. This shift alone is evidence that organizational learning was occurring. Unfortunately, there is not a great deal of evidence to suggest that the levels of trust or feelings of efficacy had changed throughout the organization. There were, however, positive indicators that OLL team interventions were perceived by non-team members as facilitating organizational learning. See Table One. At the end of the first year, only12% of those interviewed perceived little or no impact and were negative toward its prospects. One such negative viewpoint was expressed by a counsellor who indicated that even though the project had been ongoing for more than a year, he was not aware that the project existed:

> I'm aware of very little of what this learning organization is. I didn't know up until this morning that we even had a leadership team in place. I was aware that there was a group of people together who were doing certain things, but I didn't know they were called a leadership team. I didn't know who was on the team, only one person, and I only knew of one task that they have done.

While 12% of the respondents agreed with the above negative perception of the learning organization project, 89% perceived that the OLL team had at least some impact on the school

and were optimistic in their expectations of it. For example, one counsellor, when asked if the learning organization project had changed things, commented,

> Not a whole lot, we are getting some good feedback from our team member. In a lot of ways, it is still a mystery. But you can see some of the things that are going on. You can look at report books making the communication better and the things done in the cafeteria that you see came from the Learning Organization Project. You know there is a lot of good discussion about it, but I think . . . they are only starting to get into the real deal of what. . . . It has potential [though]. It seems, they have spent a lot of time on what the learning organization should be before they actually start getting into what we should do.

Twenty-four percent of those who felt that the organizational learning project has had an impact, perceived that impact to be quite pronounced. An example of such a response came from one of the OLL team members:

> It has made a real difference to those of us on the learning organization team. I think that it has made a real difference. . . . We have involved counsellors, kitchen staff, secretarial staff, social worker staff, counsellors, all the way through this facility. . . . It has opened up a whole new world for me. . . . I like the direction that it's going.

The assistant administrator felt that the OLL team had resulted in significant changes:

> One of the key things that has happened over the past year and a half that is directly associated with our work and learning organizations is an opening up of the boundaries between the professions within the organization. Three or four years ago they were closed camps. There was little sharing between the groups. There was a great deal of stress associated with interaction between the groups. Since we've started exploring ourselves and looking at whom we are and working together as a team, there is much more sharing now than in the past. That is directly related to our work in learning organizations. That comes from looking at ourselves and talking about it with each other.

Some of the interviewees felt that the work of the OLL team had impacted positively on staff morale throughout the school. Fifty-three percent of the interviewees indicated that they felt that while morale was low, it appeared to be improving since the beginning of the learning organization process. The following comments are typical of those that we included among the 53% who felt that morale was improving:

> It's improved, I think, over the last year or so. . . . Giving staff more input in meetings. Doing more training and becoming involved on unit programs have all helped.

> Right now morale is picking up. For a while morale was bottomed right out. It's starting to come back.

> I think, but for the shift workers it is probably harder, but that is probably improving too, now that they're getting more involved in programs and getting some in-service.
>
> Morale seems to be going up because, basically, what's happening through all the training, counsellors are probably getting a little more responsibility to make decisions and for that reason, then, that builds up our morale, makes us feel like we're valued.

Eighty-two percent of the interviewees felt that the learning organization interventions had improved communication. For example, one counsellor commented,

> The communication between staff and management has changed. I think a lot of the managers are more open.

Another counsellor reported that,

> communication has increased 1000% since we can do the actual communicating ourselves, without having a "go-between."

The creation of an OLL team is consistent with the recommendation made by Argyris and Schön (1978) that a top level steering committee be appointed to facilitate organizational learning. The OLL team was representative of all employee groups and included two external interventionists as facilitators. The team engaged in extensive research of the organization and engaged in work that Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner (1994) call the domain of action:

> While changes in the domain of enduring change are what really matters, attention is best placed on the domain of action. For a long time it may appear that there is nothing going on except the surface activity of the triangle [i.e. the domain of action]. People talk about new ideas. They practice the application of tools and methods. They design and implement changes in infrastructure. (p. 44)

The OLL team represented a change in leadership and in structural arrangements that facilitated distributed leadership. As a result of this team, there is evidence of various changes as noted above. One significant initiative of the OLL team was the adoption of a participatory action research model directly aimed at improving the level of organizational learning.

### *Action Research*

The OLL team adopted a participatory action research model for all initiatives whether large or small. All initiatives were subjected to a combination of multiple, short, and long term action research cycles of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation (Stoll & Fink, 1996). See Figure 1. In fact, it was largely because the OLL team had adopted such an action research model that we were able to get access to data for this study. We committed to sharing findings

with the team, and they used these findings as a means of assessment and reassessment of their existing conditions in order to make plans for growth. Also, they used the findings to evaluate the success of their plans and actions. The OLL team found the action research process to be complex and time consuming, but recognized that it contributed to their ability to learn on the basis of ongoing feedback. They no longer equated planning with implementation, or implementation with success. Each component of the action research cycle was subjected to multiple action research sub-cycles. OLL team meeting minutes revealed that the team had not just adopted this model, but had applied it to all initiatives. For example, the following excerpt from OLL team meeting minutes (March 11, 1998) reveals the use of an action research model in planning:

| | |
|---|---|
| Issue: | How will provincial high school reorganization impact on this school? |
| Assessment: | We need more information about the high school program before we can proceed. |
| Plan of Action: | The principal will get the information from the Department of Education. |
| Implementation: | The principal will contact the Director of Programs at the Department of Education by January 29. |
| Evaluation: | At the next regular meeting of the committee, the principal will share the new information. Evaluation will be based on whether or not the implementation of the plan has occurred and whether we can proceed to another cycle. |

Elden and Levin (1991) contend that action research facilitates organizational learning because it provides opportunities for participants to learn how to learn. In this case, use of an action research model allowed the OLL team to learn that change was not a linear process. For example, as they began to use the action research model to deal with the issue in the case cited above, they quickly began to realize that they did not have enough information regarding many of the issues for which they wanted to develop plans. After several less than successful attempts to get information, they began to realize that they needed to employ an action research cycle for all actions, including information gathering. As a result, they conceptualized their action research model in a manner represented in Figure 2. This figure represents action research as a complex process of multiple interactive cycles occurring in an iterative fashion.

As a result of the action research approach, many individuals throughout the organization were engaged in the decision-making process throughout the school. The evaluation and assessment components inherent in the approach ensured feedback and accountability for all plans. It

appears that the facilitative role of action research at PWA was similar to that reported by Whyte, Greenwood, and Lazes (1991) at Xerox.

> Participatory action research created and guided a powerful process of organizational learning - a process whereby leaders of labour and management learned from each other and from the consultant/facilitator, while he learned from them. (p.30)

The action research process represents a structural change that insured active engagement of many employees in leadership activities. Employees no longer assumed that just because something had been planned, that implementation of change would occur. Also, as a result of emphasis on the various stages in the action research model, OLL team members recognized the necessity of considering the systemic nature of all issues, and they learned to consider and engage internal and external players.

***Crises and Mandated External Reviews***

Several internal crises, including a student suicide and a violent student attack of a counsellor led to three external reviews over a short time span of two to three years. While the separate reviews did not result in more than minor, incremental changes that could be defined as "single-loop" learning, the two crises, constant public scrutiny, negative media attention, and the repeated reviews provided the context and "critical tension" that facilitated an organizational recognition of the need for major change or "double-loop" learning. In fact, each new review occurred as a consequence of the inaction resulting from a previous review. Following the third review, headquarters, acting on the reviewers recommendations, mandated structural changes that eliminated several middle management positions, thereby, forcing the school's administrators to redefine the roles and responsibilities of the remaining employees. While the assistant administrator felt that these reviews have really had minimal impact on school operations, he recognized that, the third review had created a need for change.

> Most of the review reports that have been done on the organization have had little impact. The [third] report had more impact than any of the others because it reflected what was happening in the organization. It didn't direct what was happening because a lot of the changes that occurred within the organization were happening before and at the same time as the review was in progress. So, her [the author's] conclusions reflected what we were doing. They didn't drive what we were doing. However, I think though, the report made the organization as a whole--and when I say that, I mean headquarters, the upper echelons within the organization--aware of the issues. Restructuring imposed by government had a significant impact because so many people lost their jobs, but again, it didn't change the direction that we were taking in making people more responsible and giving them more freedom and independence in their roles. It just accelerated the pace in which we were moving because all of a sudden we had lost key players and things had to happen right away.

Louis (1994) noted that mature organizations like schools often do not learn as a consequence of a crisis, rather they provide evidence that their performance is actually okay or they assume that the crisis will pass with time. This appears to have been the case with this school for a number of years; however, it appears that the number of crises, the extent of the external political pressure, three external reviews, and forced downsizing eventually provided an impetus for learning that led to the setup of the OLL team.

***Individual Employee Learning and Distributed Leadership***

Eighty-three percent of the interview respondents perceived that training opportunities were available to them as employees of the school; and 64% felt that they, at least, had some input into the determination of the training focus. See Table 1. A primary source of learning within the school was a train-the-trainer model, whereby members with particular expertise provided training for others in the school. As a consequence, people at this school rarely looked to other schools as a source of knowledge. However, it was clear that they were willing to learn, and had learned from external sources.

Several individuals who were engaged in formal educational programs brought new knowledge to the school. They shared their new knowledge with others, and as a consequence, the organization was able to avail of external sources of knowledge. For example, the divisional head of teaching had been completing a graduate course at a local university. As part of this course, he had become familiar with the research related to organizational learning. He was excited by the potential of an organizational learning framework for his division, and organized a one-day awareness session for his staff and the divisional heads for social work and nursing. Following this one-day session, the three divisional heads collaboratively decided that the learning organization model had potential for the entire school. They introduced the idea to the senior administrators who subsequently met with the university researcher who had delivered the original awareness session. As a consequence, a research and development partnership was created. This particular partnership facilitated organizational learning through the creation of the OLL team and an advisory group to the senior administrators. Several other members of the organization, a counsellor, a teacher, and a headquarters professional development officer, were also completing graduate degrees, and they shared ideas and theories with other members of the OLL team. In this manner, individuals and the organization learned from both internal and external sources.

The professional development officer with district headquarters was a prominent external source of learning at PWA. This person began work with the school at the same time that the OLL team was formed and she became an active member and leader of the team. She coordinated much of the team's work and collaborated in the development and implementation of several of the team's action plans. She provided training for the counsellors, and attempted to integrate

ongoing staff training with OLL team action plans. Interviewees viewed training opportunities quite positively, and attributed much of the training to this professional development officer.

The assistant administrator was a strong internal source of leadership for learning. He communicated his desire to change the prevailing model of leadership at the school and demonstrated his commitment to shared leadership. It was largely through his efforts that the OLL team existed and that resources were provided to support the team's work. Both he and the professional development officer, noted above were able to access funds outside of regular school budgets to support both the OLL team and staff training. He acted as the liaison between management and workers, and between the OLL team and other members of the organization, including key administrators at headquarters.

The leadership roles assumed by the individuals identified above suggest that they were willing to participate in a model of leadership outside of the traditional, hierarchical models. These individuals were anxious to be involved as leaders of change and improvement, and were committed to making a difference to the learning environment at the school in a manner consistent with what Fullan (1995) argues is required if schools are to become learning organizations. The willingness of staff to engage in leadership of the organization is indicated by the fact that 55% of individuals who were interviewed noted that they felt comfortable making suggestions for improvements to the organization. See Table 2. Also, when staff members were asked through a survey to indicate the sources of leadership that positively impacted on the organization, all internal role categories were rated above 20%, and individuals rated their own role category higher than other categories. Certainly, leadership was perceived to be distributed. More than 70% of the respondents agreed that counsellors provided leadership that positively impacts on the organization, 60% agreed that social workers were key leaders, and 37% perceived that the assistant administrator provided crucial leadership. The widespread perception that many groups provided leadership for improvement, together with the researchers observations of the OLL team meetings, suggest that there existed shared leadership in respect to selected aspects of the organization and that the level of employee involvement in leadership was growing. In cases where this leadership was nurtured, it acted as a catalyst for organizational learning. Training was established as a routine aspect of organizational functioning and sharing of expertise was institutionalized. It was apparent that leadership and structures in support of knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing were emerging at PWA.

Louis (1994) contends that current expectations that most teachers and principals have about the nature of leadership are inconsistent with emerging images of leadership presented in the literature. She argues that attention must be paid to mid-career managers, such as principals, if we are to make progress in this area. At PWA, there was a concerted effort to expose managers and employees to the emerging models of leadership (eg., transformational leadership) through the OLL team, and this appeared to be having a positive impact. Senior school administrators were making an effort to foster "communities-of-practice" (Hendry, 1995) in which the employees were actively engaged in the leadership of the school. Knowledge sharing was formalized through a train-the-trainer approach. Through this approach, employees were given

the leadership responsibilities as they were expected to share their acquired knowledge with their colleagues. Other employees, including middle managers, had clearly demonstrated that they had accepted leadership responsibilities as they had shared newly acquired knowledge that they had obtained from external sources.

While the aforementioned factors--the OLL team, the action research, the crises, the external pressures, the acquisition and sharing of knowledge, and the distributed leadership--enhanced organizational learning, there continued to exist organizational structures and conditions that inhibited learning.

**Factors that Impede Organizational Learning at PWA**

At the first meeting of the OLL team, members were asked to identify factors that they considered to be barriers to organizational learning. During small group brainstorming sessions, they identified the following impeding factors: poor communication, lack of trust, lack of a clear focus, lack of time and resources, no strategic plan, lack of job security, low morale, complex policies, role conflict, and no defined measures of success. These barriers to learning are described in greater detail in Table 3. Throughout the following sections, we will discuss these barriers and others, under the following headings:

- ***Clearly Defined Role Distinctions***
- ***Division into Departments and Units***
- ***Part-time, On-call Workers***
- ***An Established and Accepted Bureaucratic Hierarchy***
- ***Lack of a Shared Vision or Purpose***
- ***Limited Expertise in Information Technology and Underdeveloped Infrastructures***
- ***Staff Changes***
- ***Public Attention in the Context of Competing Goals***
- ***Political Interference***

*Clearly Defined Role Distinctions*

There existed seven distinct groups of workers at PWA and each appeared to be somewhat suspicious of the other. When asked to identify what would be needed to assist the school in becoming a learning organization, one of the key recommendations was the need to increase the level of trust. The concerns expressed in the following OLL team meeting minutes are indicative of the level of trust at the school:

> Trust. . . . This issue was a very important topic. Issues discussed related to the lack of trust that existed between the front line staff and management at the local level; and it

> was made clear that there existed a more permanent lack of faith in the intentions and mandate of the management staff at headquarters. (September 29, 1997)

Teachers thought that the social workers had more influence than they did. Counsellors felt that teachers held an elitist attitude toward others in the school and that they thought that others had nothing worthwhile to contribute to the students' education. The teachers, social workers, and nurses thought that the counsellors were concerned only for their own welfare. All non-management groups felt that the administrators were plotting against them. An example of the division between various departments and the lack of trust in administrators occurred at the first meeting of the OLL team. After considerable consultation within the school, the assistant administrators appointed members to the team in a manner to insure the inclusion of all of the department heads, two union executive members, and proportional staff representation. As well, the assistant administrator selected particular members because he perceived them to be leaders within the organization. Several members were highly suspicious of the method of selection and expressed that suspicion. As a result of an acrimonious debate, the OLL team was expanded to improve representation. There was also a great deal of suspicion surrounding the purpose of the OLL team. Several of the selected individuals had previously been members of a strategic planning committee that some suggested had been used to promote management's agenda.

Throughout the two years following the initial OLL team meeting, there was an observable change in the level of trust among members of the OLL team; however, there was little observable change in this regard throughout the organization. Results of an organizational survey, conducted one year after the OLL team was formed, clearly identified the continued low level of trust and the perceived variations in the amount of influence of various groups and individuals. Only 24% of the survey respondents thought that leadership was shared beyond the school's administrators. Even more revealing is that only 22% felt that people were comfortable speaking their minds without fear of reprisal. Only 9% thought that decision-making was shared with all staff and a similar small number, 16%, thought that everyone's ideas were given equal weight. Interview responses confirmed the validity of these survey findings. See Table 1. For instance, the following comment by one counsellor reveals the pervasive perception that input from some individuals and groups are valued more than others:

> It seems as if we have little pockets. For some, the teachers are the most important ones, for others, the social workers are the most important ones, and sometimes the counsellors are the same. At certain times, it certainly is mainly the social workers, who are the important ones. It seems like they know the kids. The counsellors, I think, sometimes believe that they're not being valued and sometimes it's true. I think that when you're dealing with a large group, such as the counsellors, the other groups tend to look at the least common denominator and that gets transferred to everybody.

Sarason (1998) contends that an essential component of leadership is that the leader enlists the hearts and minds of the other members of the organization in the creation of a vision and in

efforts to strive toward that vision. If people feel that their personal visions and perspectives are not valued in this respect, then the vision is not likely to be fulfilled.

> Unless workers (learners) have some meaningful role in decision making and planning, unless they feel safe to articulate their ideas and feelings, unless there is for them a basis for a sense of psychological ownership, the quality of the product will suffer. (P.26)

Similarly, O'Toole (1996) states that,

> What is required to guide effective change is . . . a new philosophy of leadership that is always and at all times focused on enlisting the hearts and minds of followers through inclusion and participation. Such a philosophy must be rooted in the most fundamental of moral principles: respect for people. (p.11)

Many of these employees felt that they were not included in a meaningful manner. They felt that some individuals or groups were respected more than others. As a result, there existed more suspicion than trust, and O'Toole contends that, "what creates trust, in the end, is the leader's manifest respect for the followers" (p.9).

Also, because of clearly defined role distinctions, people tended to focus only on their position, and did not see how their own actions extended beyond that position. Senge (1990) contends that such narrow focusing results in an organizational learning disability that inhibits systems thinking.

Lambert et al. (1996) contend that group learning is essential if the undiscussables are to be challenged. Argyris and Schön (1991) have found that many organizations have "undiscussables," or values, beliefs, and practices which are embedded in the organization, but never examined. In fact, even their existence is undiscussable, and the organization develops defensive routines to hide them. Such defensive routines act as primary inhibitors of learning. In an environment such as the one that existed at PWA, where people did not feel that their perspectives were valued to the extent that others were, the undiscussables were unlikely to be challenged (O'Toole, 1996). In fact, even in OLL team meetings, where the discussants openly explored strategies to facilitate dialoguing, the researchers rarely witnessed the challenging of mental models, clearly revealing how difficult this process is.

***Division into Departments and Units***

PWA was very departmentalized with each department having its own department head. To add to that, the students were divided into a series of four distinct units. The nursing and social work departments were small and therefore nurses and social workers work across units. Because the counselling and teaching staff were larger, they were assigned to specific units. While the structure provided for collaboration between teachers and counsellors on each unit, few felt that

this was happening because of clearly defined roles and differing work schedules. The counsellors operated on rotating shifts while the teachers operated within the schedule of the regular school system. They were on the units for approximately five hours during the day, Monday to Friday. When the counsellors worked the evening shift or weekends, they had no opportunity to collaborate with teachers. Also, teachers' holiday schedules were similar to those in the regular school system. They had extended breaks during Christmas, spring, and summer, even though the students had no such break. During these times, when teachers were not available, the counsellors were expected to provide educational services to students. This was a source of some conflict as the counsellors, some of them certified teachers, were paid much less than teachers. This created a tension that inhibited collaboration between these two groups.

Nurses and social workers worked day shifts, as all other employees in the school, with the exception of the counsellors and counsellor supervisors. They visited the various units as needed, but remained in any particular unit only as long as a particular task required. They had little direct contact with the teachers or the counsellors. In fact, most communication occurred by jot note in a shift report book that was kept in each unit. The other staff groups worked in a general area of the school. Some of them, such as the counsellor supervisors, visited the units regularly, but all others worked in their particular part of the facility, having minimal contact with other employees. Ongoing collaboration, either within or across divisions, was quite limited in such an environment. The primary mechanism of collaboration was the individual program planning team. This team included representatives from all groups that worked directly with students. It was responsible for the development, delivery, and assessment of the program plan for each student. Unfortunately, not all individuals or groups felt that their perspectives were treated equally to others in team meetings. For example, one counsellor reported:

> In any group there is an in-crowd--some people that are more impressive. You're going to get some that have this overwhelming sense of self importance and that cause some butting of heads in some of the program planning meetings. Generally, in the program meetings you got a counsellor, a teacher, a social worker, and a counsellor supervisor. So you have one, at least, from each of the different roles. I have the distinct feeling that especially with the teachers, our opinion is not as valuable as what theirs is, more so than I even get from the social workers.

Within the existing structures, whereby individuals were assigned to specific units and assigned responsibilities according to designated roles or job classification, it is not surprising that only 47% of those interviewed felt responsible for the entire school. See Table 1. Below is a sample of responses to the question, "Do you feel responsible for the welfare of the entire school or do you just feel responsible for your specific job?"

A counsellor commented, "I feel mostly responsible just for a specific job as a counsellor"

A nurse noted that she had learned that feeling responsible for the whole school was very stressful and that as a result she had focussed on her specific job:

> I found it really difficult when I first came here because I felt that being a nurse, and not being responsible for a unit, I felt that I was supposed to know everything that was going on in this facility. I sometimes felt that even something that had to do with safety out around. . . . I felt that I was the one that was responsible and would probably feel bad that I didn't act. I think that I got to a place that I realized that I had to learn not to be carrying all this stuff, responsible for everything that was going on in the students' lives and thinking that I had to try and fix it. I am learning to leave a lot of it here and not to be taking it home with me.

While the forgoing comment suggests that this nurse was attempting to deny responsibility for more than her specific role, the following comment by a social worker reveals someone who continued to feel that sense of obligation regarding the welfare of the entire school:

> Part of the trouble, I have here, is the fact that I feel too responsible for the entire school and I feel that you always have to be overseeing things around here because there are people who don't always pay attention to detail. I pay a lot of attention to detail . . . , so I feel a lot of responsibility for a lot of things. Maybe I shouldn't. Maybe I should let others do it, but I can't help it.

The structural inhibitors of learning that have been noted by Louis (1994) were apparent at PWA. She contends that, "if schools are to become learning organizations they will require a profound change in the use of time so that teachers and administrators have the opportunity to work together to begin the real task of restructuring" (p.17). The personnel at PWA had limited opportunity to engage in team learning and to learn necessary dialoguing skills. The existence of such limiting structures also promotes "groupthink" (Janis, 1982), thereby creating an environment that supports the status quo, rather than encourage any challenge to mental models that exist. Certainly, throughout the OLL team process, it remained quite evident that groups looked to blame other groups for their problems. Senge et al. (1994) argue that one of the "learning disabilities" of organizations is that people within the organization perceive that "the enemy is out there" and find someone or something else to blame for failures. At this school, this disability extended to between internal groups as well as between internal and external groups. It was apparent that groups did not understand the role of the other groups in the system and certainly, groups, other than management, social workers, and teachers, did not feel valued in the organization.

***Part-time, On-call Workers***

Collaboration among counsellors was restricted in several ways. The division into units and the shift work prevented personal contact, and were obvious inhibitors of communication. A large number of on-call, part-time counsellors (more than 100 people) were essential to routine operations. In reality, many of these on-call counsellors worked as many hours as full-time counsellors. Unfortunately, because of the large numbers of such counsellors, the organization

was unable to provide an adequate communication network that included them. Nor was the organization able to provide this group with the ongoing training provided to other full-time employees.

The permanent counsellors noted that training was essential because their role was changing significantly. Also, they were quite positive that the training opportunities available to them adequately met their needs. See Table 1. They recognized, however, that these same training opportunities were not made available to the on-call counsellors who were required to make the same adaptations to the role.

Because there was no system to ensure ongoing training for part-time counsellors and because they were not included as an integral component of the school's communications network, there were gaps in learning. This learning gap in the organization often led to perceptions that new policies or procedures were not followed, that morale was low, or that people felt insecure about their jobs at the school. For example, in answer to a question regarding whether she felt secure in her job, an on-call worker replied, "No, I'm on-call right now. I'm eleventh or twelfth on the call list. It's difficult right now to get your full hours in, in a given pay period." When the OLL team attempted to interpret data that suggested that morale in the organization was low (93%), one of the suggestions that received considerable support was that the discontent and low morale largely resulted from those on-call workers that felt disenfranchised.

Senge (1990) contends that the organization must attend to personal mastery within the organization if it is to become a learning organization. Certainly, issues of particular concern to a large group of individuals at this school were left unattended, and it is apparent that organizational learning was negatively impacted as a result.

### *An Established and Accepted Bureaucratic Hierarchy*

As in many organizations, at this school there existed a defined hierarchy that limited trust, initiative, and creativity at PWA. All personnel, including the senior administrators, recognized that they were accountable to headquarters that was managed in a highly bureaucratic manner. In this bureaucratic environment, "leader" was perceived to be synonymous with "management"; therefore, appointing a person to the OLL team was perceived as placing a person in a position of authority in the hierarchy. Generally, the workers at the school accepted such a structure and tended to wait for others to propose solutions to their problems and blamed management if solutions were deemed to be inappropriate. Certainly, people accepted the reality that policies were developed by senior management. Even though they believed that there were too many policies, and that many of them were too rigid and complex, when they were asked to provide feedback during the development phase of any policy, they refused to participate because they believed that management controlled the final decision anyway (OLL team meeting minutes, March 11, 1998). In such a hierarchical environment, the concept of shared leadership was foreign. OLL team members continued to have considerable difficulty with it, and for others,

shared leadership was a concept that was entirely outside of their existing assumptions or "mental models" of what leadership should be. Most employees within the organization assumed that someone else, at the top, was responsible for improvements. While employees did not have a great deal of confidence that management would make good decisions, they felt that they had little power to change things. This feeling of futility was reflected in the interview responses with only 47% of those interviewed indicating that they felt encouraged to suggest improvements. See Table 1. Any radical departure from the current hierarchical model would not be accepted by headquarters, the union, or the employees.

The following comment is typical of the perspective that many employees held in respect to management:

> Managers are still out of touch. There are people here who come in on their days off, hanging around the building and such, and they're part of the elite crowd at the top, or "the clique" or whatever you want to name them.

These traditional views of bureaucracy and hierarchy were apparent in union-management relationships as well. Union officials routinely demonstrated that it was their role to act in opposition to anything that management proposed. The lack of trust that was revealed at the first meeting of the OLL team (described above in **Clearly Defined Role Distinctions**) was largely a consequence of the union's mistrust of senior administration. This mistrust continued throughout the first year. As a result, OLL team discussions were, at times, quite difficult until one of the union executive members withdrew from the process. While this person was a member of the team, he often inhibited the team's efforts at genuine dialogue through personal attack and innuendo. While his frankness might have served a useful function because he raised issues that others perceived to be "undiscussables," the negativity generated as a consequence, prevented further discussion by others and counteracted any potential positive impact. When he withdrew from the OLL team following a union-management conflict that occurred outside of the committee, he cited the conflict as an example of lack of progress made by the OLL team and management's continued authoritarian approach to leadership.

The assistant administrator was committed to shifting the model of leadership to a more collaborative one, and was committed to learning what that would mean for the organizational structures in the school. The senior administrator was supportive of the assistant administrator's efforts, and was willing to delegate the responsibility of the OLL team to him. However, while he espoused that he supported a shift to shared leadership, it was quite clear that he did not practice the leadership approach inherent in the learning organization framework. It was clear that he believed that policy development and final decision-making remained the prerogative of senior management. In addition to his "mental models" of leadership, the senior administrator was dramatically influenced by external and political realities.

The pervasive perspective of leadership appeared to be consistent with the"super hero" referenced by Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (1998) which is embedded in the following quotation by Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, & Richert (1996):

> Since the days of the Egyptians and Romans, organizational ideas have tended toward amassing power and authority at the top of a hierarchy. The bureaucracy of schools creates conditions of social interaction that imitate factory hands in a production line .... Those at the top have the right to direct the behaviours of those further down in the hierarchy. Because those at the bottom (factory workers, teachers, students) are always larger in number than those at the top, strategies have to be used to establish and maintain control. These strategies have involved rules, regulations, punishments, incentives, and cultures based on formal authority, patriarchy, and isolation. These ideas have become particularly fixed and unchallenged in public bureaucracies such as education. (p. 3)

The employees accepted the right of those at the top to develop policies and regulations that control activities and behaviors in the school. Most recognized that the school could better serve the needs of the students; however, they were waiting for someone else to provide the solutions.

***Lack of a Shared Vision or Purpose***

The members of PWA had not developed shared images (Senge et al., 1994) of the future they wished to create, and in the absence of such a common vision, they were not able to develop organizational maps (Argyris & Schön, 1978) of principles or practices of how to move forward. The researchers assumed that if a shared vision existed, employees should have been able to articulate that vision and the collection of personal preferences should have been consistent with that vision. Also, if employees perceived the purpose of the organization to be different from what they preferred, it is reasonable to assume that a shared vision did not exist. Similarly, if an organizational map of how to get to a desired future had existed, then people should have been aware of it, or at least, it is reasonable to assume that they should have been aware of the existence of processes that were in operation. Data suggest that these conditions did not exist. During the interviews, 59% of the interviewees indicated that the school attempted to promote both security and rehabilitation equally. See Table 1. However, 6% perceived that security is currently the primary purpose, while 29% perceived it to be rehabilitation. The level of uncertainty surrounding the school's primary purpose was further revealed when staff members were questioned as to what they thought the purpose should be. Twenty-three percent felt that more emphasis should be placed on security and 47% felt that there should be more emphasis on rehabilitation. Survey data are consistent with the interview findings that no shared vision existed. Only 28% of respondents perceived that there was an agreed purpose. Only 9% perceived that there existed a vision statement that guided what people did at PWA, and only 6% perceived that there was a clear plan for moving forward. It is apparent that no shared vision existed.

Argyris and Schön (1978) argue that learning is inhibited when management define goals independent of others. Deal and Peterson (1999) contend that shared visions

> define outcomes that are valued and shape how energy and time are allocated . . . They define what actions ought to occur; they motivate staff and students by signaling what is important and what will be rewarded; they steer the allocation and distribution of resources, depending on what is considered important or valuable. p. 26

Evidence from PWA indicates that the focus of energy and time was undetermined, the staff was divided in respect to knowing what was important or what would be rewarded, and the senior administration determined budget priorities and goals at the will of his political masters.

***Limited Expertise in Information Technology and Underdeveloped Infrastructures***

With the rapidly increasing potential of computer technology and evidence of its impact on changes in other organizational settings, it is jarring that only 11% of the respondents perceived it as having an impact on the way they did work, and an even smaller percentage (7%) viewed it as having impact on the students' activities. Few employees were aware of the potential of the emerging information and communications technologies and even fewer had developed any skills in this regard. There were several obsolete computers available to students in a computer centre, however, none of these were connected to the Internet.

There was no evidence of any consideration that information and communications technologies should be a component of the students' education at this school. While many staff members believed strongly that the school's role was to provide an education that would allow students to reintegrate into regular schools and into society as contributing citizens with a renewed sense of self-worth, they perceived no connection with the emerging knowledge society. Several teachers had Internet accounts; however, there existed no regular culture of Internet use at the school. Issues of security appeared to be at the centre of an apparent reluctance to even explore the potential of these technologies for students and employees.

While the cost of developing information and communication technology infrastructures may also have been an issue of some concern, no effort was made to explore potential sources of support for such development. Even during discussions regarding the need for improved communications within the organization, the OLL team refused to entertain the potential of a local area network. Certainly, neither management nor the OLL team had reacted to the need for information and communication technology as articulated by Kozma and Schank (1998); nor had they internalized their warning that schools must make a major shift toward preparing students for the information age. Furthermore, in this respect, they had not sought to learn from external sources. The school is located within the boundaries of a large progressive school district where teacher professional development in respect to the use of information technology in the learning environment is routine. Most schools in that neighbouring district appeared to be quite

progressive in their use of information technology; however, teachers from this school had not sought to participate in their professional development activities or to learn from them.

***Staff Changes***

During the first year of the learning organization project, three of the members of the OLL team left the school to take jobs elsewhere. All three were department heads in social work, teaching, and nursing. Because these people were strong leaders who were supportive of a new organizational approach at the school, their departure slowed the progress of the team as their replacements adapted to their new roles, established themselves as leaders, and learned the theories, methods, and tools that had been adopted by the OLL team. While the OLL team meeting minutes acted as an organizational memory (Argyris & Schön, 1978) and were useful in the learning process, some additional introductory sessions were required to help the new members understand the theoretical framework guiding the team's work.

Organizational memory of the school as a whole was primarily maintained through memories of individual employees, and through organizational practices that had become part of the accepted culture. Most were aware that policies and regulations existed, but few appeared to know the specifics of these policies. In fact, they complained that there were too many perfunctory, complex policies that had little impact upon the organization. The organizational memories that appeared to be the most robust related to a restructuring effort that resulted in the consolidation of three schools into one. Prior to 1995, there were three schools to serve these special students. As a result of the consolidation, two of the buildings were closed, a new building was constructed, and the third, located approximately 100 kilometres from the main campus, became a satellite of that campus, sharing a common administration. As a result of consolidation, many employees were forced to commute a considerable distance or to relocate in order to continue working at the school. These employees felt that the choice of location was political and had never willingly accepted it; consequently, they harbored a shared group memory that continued to inhibit learning, and contributed to continued staff turnover.

Lambert et al. (1996) contend that those who accept the bureaucratic status quo within organizations tend to stay. Unfortunately, this appears to be the case at PWA. Many of the employees who believed in participatory leadership or were committed to the organization were frustrated with the negativity and complacency that existed at the school. Several of these, such as the three OLL team members noted above, left the school to work elsewhere. Unfortunately, the positive individual memories that they were beginning to develop had not been well mapped and therefore, did not have the positive impact that potentially existed. While some positive group memory continued to exist through the OLL team, for example, it is apparent that the negative organizational memories remained quite robust.

***Public Attention in the Context of Competing Goals***

Throughout the duration of this study, PWA received considerable public attention. Because there continued to be considerable debate among the Canadian public regarding society's obligations to young offenders, the goals of this organization remained unclear. In fact, media reports (reference not reported to protect the school's anonymity) clearly revealed the schizophrenic nature of public perspectives regarding the primary role of this school. One report condemned the school for being too lenient and too concerned with the students' welfare, suggesting that such schools should get tough with young offenders, while another report was highly critical of the lack of emphasis on rehabilitation and education. Similar debates occur at headquarters as well as within the school itself. Perhaps, it is because of the dichotomy that exists between the need for education and security, that the senior administrator appeared not to have any desire to deal with the question of vision. Even when presented with the data that indicated that organizational members were somewhat divided on the question of primary purpose, he stated that this was not surprising. He noted that the school's mandate was to balance education and security, and that it was reasonable to expect that the appropriate balance would change with public sentiments and political will. While the administrator did not see the value of developing a shared vision for the organization, 85% of the survey respondents challenged the proposed notion that "developing a shared vision is a waste of time."

Kozma and Schank (1998) contend that only by looking outside will schools learn what new skills students need to acquire in the information age. Unfortunately, this school continued to have great difficulty in this regard. They recognized that there existed no consensus in respect to goals for the students that they serve. Each time that issues related to goals of the school reached the public domain the debate was acrimonious, and their efforts to maintain some balanced approach to the debates invariably led to discontent from both sides of the debate. Therefore, rather than seeking the advice or support of the larger community, they attempted to avoid any public attention. The OLL team had targeted communication and public relations as major themes needing attention. They identified these themes on the basis of their own survey research which revealed that only 7% of the staff perceived that they actively promoted the school in the community, and only 8% thought that the public was supportive. This school had no tradition of enlisting external support. In fact, of those interviewed, only 36% agreed that the school made good use of community resources. See Table 1. They rarely availed of resources that are available from the neighboring school board and no partnerships had been developed.

Consistent with the survey and interview data regarding this lack of external connection, internal documents reveal that despite a general concern among employees about the poor record of their students at reintegrating in their home schools and in their communities, they had done little to connect with the schools and the communities concerned. They recognize that the home environment of many of their students was quite difficult, but there was no outreach program designed to address that issue.

Because public pressure was so intense and yet so divided, employee morale was negatively impacted. See Table 1. While they felt relatively secure in their jobs because of union seniority, their morale was quite low. Seventy-seven percent of those interviewed noted that they liked their job and that they liked working at PWA. In spite of this, however, 53% of the interviewees perceived that morale was low. Of the others, 35% felt that while morale was low, it appeared to be improving. In fact, 53% perceived it to be higher than in the past. The primary concern related to morale, though, is that only 6% viewed it to be high. The sample comments below illustrate the range of perspectives relating to morale:

- I think it's very low.

- It's improved, I think, over the last year or so. Talk of reclassification certainly gave a big boost, giving staff more input on the meetings. Doing more training and becoming involved in unit programs have all helped.

- Right now morale is picking up. For a while morale was bottomed right out. It's starting to come back, but I find in this type of work, morale just jumps from a high to a low, high to a low. It's never a consistent happy atmosphere.

- I think, probably, for the shift workers it is probably harder, but that is probably improving, too, now that they're getting more involved in programs and getting some in-service.

- And they want to know about the staff morale! There's none, not from my perspective. It makes me angry. I'm almost shaking here just talking about it. And you tell people, if something is not done soon then the morale of this place, from the staff perspective, is going to be in the ditches.

- Overall, it's good. I enjoy working here. I don't mind at all coming here. Some of the workers don't have good morale all the time. It can be very negative on occasion, but generally it's positive. . . . There's a lot of petty jealousy around here and . . . I think we got some serious problems here.

OLL team interpretations of these findings in respect to low morale were varied. However, included among the most common interpretations offered were the public pressures and frustrations related to the ever-changing public and government perspectives on the correct balance between education and security at PWA.

***Political Interference***

Because the organization was under constant public scrutiny, many of the decisions that would normally be made by senior administrators at the school level were made by the politicians. As

a result, the school's administrators were viewed by the union personnel and all employees with suspicion. Politicians reacted to public pressure on the school by ordering several reviews and a major restructuring that resulted in significant downsizing and job loss. In fact, while many schools suffer from "initiative-itis" (Hendry, 1996), this school suffered from "review-itis." These reviews and reports were completed without having any major impact; consequently, the employees had assumed the attitude that "this too shall pass." As a result of the multiple reviews, each with a different set of proposed cures, the energies and attention of the school's personnel were dissipated. There was no opportunity for reflection, and no opportunity for improvements based on feedback cycles. The inhibiting features of such circumstances are well documented elsewhere (Hendry, 1996; Louis, 1994, Senge, 1990).

The dysfunctional nature of this external pressure was dramatically illustrated during one of the OLL team's action research projects. The team gathered data on the leadership and other organizational issues that might influence organizational learning. The data were analyzed; a final report was written and presented to the OLL team. All were enthusiastic that this report would serve as the basis for broad consultation throughout the organization that would lead to the development of a strategic plan. However, because the report revealed organizational weaknesses as well as strengths, the team had some concerns that if it were released to all employees, it would probably be leaked to the media who would sensationalize the weaknesses. Because they feared the repercussions from such negative publicity, they attempted to revise the report so that it provided the same messages, but with fewer specific details. The revised report was presented to the OLL team members who felt that they should now proceed to discuss this with their constituent groups as originally planned. Because of several lingering fears, the report was presented to the director at headquarters who in turn sent it to a senior public relations officer with government. This officer reported that the report was to remain as a confidential working document for the OLL team. This decision not to release the report to all members of the organization further inhibited organizational learning. The OLL team had conducted the research and had explained to the participants that the results would be used in a manner that would allow a collaborative approach to the development of a strategic plan. Its non release created more distrust throughout the organization and eliminated many employees from participating in and contributing to a key organizational learning experience.

The members of the OLL team recognized all these issues related to purpose, public relations, the home environment, and reintegration, but rather than develop strategies to deal with them, they appeared to view them as beyond their control. Either they had determined that they did not have sufficient resources to deal with the issues, they believe it is someone else's responsibility, or they accepted that this was a reality that they could not change. Either way, these external concerns were perceived in a manner consistent with Senge's "enemy that is out there" syndrome.

## Summary and Conclusions

One finding of this case study is that a crisis can, but does not necessarily lead to learning. Before this organization began to learn, several crises occurred, and even when external pressure was exerted, the school appeared slow to respond. In fact, it was only when headquarters forced structural changes leading to redeployment of personnel that administrators saw the need for change. In fact, the formulation of the OLL team may not have occurred if the district had not imposed other changes on the school. This leads to a second finding of this study that in difficult organizational environments such as PWA, the formation of a leadership team similar to the OLL team may be essential. At PWA, the OLL team not only directly facilitated learning, but also proved to be a primary mechanism that lessened the impact of some of the inhibiting factors.

This second finding is consistent with other findings related to the critical importance of cultural, collaborative approaches to leadership in facilitating organizational learning (Darling-Hammond, Cobb, & Bullmaster, 1999; Fullan, 1999; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Sheppard & Brown, 2000). The OLL team was able to promote a new culture of openness and collaboration that impacted positively on staff morale, improved communication and became a catalyst for the surfacing of many learning inhibitors. The OLL team effectively increased the level of team learning among team members, in particular, and throughout the school more generally. As well, the team was somewhat effective in overcoming the defensive routines that perpetuated the hiding of the "undiscussables," or values, beliefs, and practices which are embedded in the organization, but never examined (Argyris and Schön, 1991, Hendry, 1996; Senge, 1990).

In spite of the successes of the OLL team, this research also demonstrates the difficulty of changing the existing culture of leadership--a third finding of this research. A commitment from senior administrators and other key organizational participants to change to a model of team leadership is just a small first step. Schein (1996) contends that senior management must be committed to organizational learning if it is to be fostered. Also, he argues that various groups within an organization must learn the culture of the other groups. At PWA, the senior administrators made some efforts to share leadership and various individuals accepted their new responsibilities in this regard. However, there appeared to be elements of competing models of leadership at play. For example, while there were formal leaders such as the assistant administrator who were anxious to share leadership, there were others, including the senior administrator, who were more traditional in their approach. Similarly, employees varied greatly in the degree of support or skepticism for more participatory models of leadership.

As well, there remained a culture of balkanization into departments and roles that continued to promote paranoia throughout the school. While the literature suggests that trust will not be created until all are trusted with information, the reality in this school is that dysfunctional internal and external politics could seriously jeopardize all efforts at organizational learning.

For example, members of the OLL team recognized that not sharing all the information that they had collected would seriously inhibit organizational learning, but they suspected, as well, that to release the information would be catastrophic. As a result, it is not at all clear how quickly this school will be able to involve the entire organization in the process of team learning that will allow current mental models to be challenged.

Additionally, the ability of any individual or group to shift the model of leadership to one that is more facilitative and collaborative is constrained by the organizational context. In a public bureaucracy such as this school, senior management is appointed or dismissed at the will of politicians or their bureaucratic appointees. Neither the politicians nor the bureaucrats who make decisions regarding PWA had accepted collaborative models of leadership or organizational structures that fall outside of the traditional bureaucratic hierarchy. As a result, any shift away from the traditional organizational chart had a significant element of risk.

A fourth finding is that knowledge acquired and shared within the context of naive systems thinking can result in simple compliance and passive acceptance or resistance of every initiative that may appear popular at any given point in time. PWA responded to multiple initiatives that came as a result of political pressures and several external reviews; however, there was no opportunity for team planning, for reflection, or for improvements based on feedback cycles. One initiative followed another without any real promise of organizational learning. A recognized problem in organizations is that of maintaining a focus amid competing external demands for the adoption of new initiatives and innovations (Hendry, 1996; Louis, 1994; Senge, 1990). Louis (1994) contends that such behavior prevents real learning. Prior to the initiation of the action research process, PWA appeared to be caught in such a dysfunctional learning pattern.

This dysfunctional learning pattern was minimized through the participatory action research process, the importance of which is a fifth finding of this study. The research partnership between university researchers and school practitioners helped overcome the lack of attention given to research and development and offset the negative learning impacts that Louis suggests result from the "relative isolation of knowledge production units (universities) from knowledge application units (schools)" (p. 18). Participants learned how to learn, and learning effectiveness increased from one episode to another. Involvement in participatory action research is an example of what Argyris and Schön (1978) identify as deutero-learning.

A sixth finding of this case study is that the more an organization engages in systems thinking to include all internal and multiple external constituents, the more difficult it may be to develop a shared vision. Even though most internal constituents deemed it important to develop a shared vision, they recognized that in their very "open" system, that process was quite complex. Senge (1990) contends that organizations must think systemically to allow for a meaningful connectedness with internal and external constituents. A key to such connectedness is to engage the constituents in the development of a shared vision of what the

school should strive toward and how to get there. The vision of this particular school is so integrated into the social fabric of Canadian society, and the issues related to its purposes and methods are so controversial, that any articulated vision will likely represent either such a compromise that it will be meaningless, or some group will feel totally disenfranchised. Unless the Canadian public is willing to enter into a serious debate surrounding the treatment of young offenders, this school will find that its purpose will be in a constant state of flux depending on the changing political landscape. As well, the debate required to achieve consensus regarding a vision in politically charged environments such as PWA has the potential to be destructive.

A seventh finding of this research is the importance of putting structures in place to support knowledge acquisition from both external and internal sources. In this study, the theoretical framework adopted by the school to maximize learning was Senge's (1990) concept of the learning organization. Knowledge of this framework came to the school by chance, rather than through any planned strategy. When one reflects on the impact that this framework had on learning at PWA, the necessity of formalizing a process that supports knowledge acquisition from external sources is apparent. DiBella et al. (1996) suggest that organizations vary according to their primary source of knowledge whether internal or external. They argue that neither of these orientations to learning is better than the other, but is rather a question of learning style. Findings from this study challenge the perspective proffered by DiBella et al. as there are indications (such as the continued lack of emphasis on information and communication technology) that suggest that without external sources of learning, this school would have continued to learn very slowing and incrementally–a finding similar to that of a previous study conducted by the authors (Sheppard & Brown, 2000). Other researchers have come to similar conclusions. Schlechty (1997), for example, affirms the need for schools to depend on external sources for their learning. He writes that "individual schools . . . do not have the capacity to support and sustain change independent of the support of larger political and social units" (p.81).

To support learning from internal sources, PWA provided scheduled release time for meetings of the OLL team and its various sub-teams. These changes to the use of time allowed workers and administrators the opportunity to work together, thereby facilitating the development of team learning (Louis, 1994). As well, the OLL team developed structures that facilitated communication among the various constituent groups throughout the organization that fostered "communities-of-practice" (Hendry, 1996) supportive of organizational learning.

While not profound or new, an eighth finding of this study reaffirmed the importance of individuals in organizational learning (Senge's personal mastery). Several individuals brought new knowledge to the school while they were pursuing their personal educational goals. The sharing of this new knowledge was an essential component of an accelerated pace of learning at PWA. Contrary to the facilitative role of such individuals within the organization, however, the study reveals, as well, the negative impact of ignoring issues or

conditions that affect the self worth of individuals. At PWA, this apparent lack of concern for personal issues led to lowered levels of morale, lack of trust, the creation of divisive thinking, and reduced the possibility of genuine team learning.

This case study reveals clearly that PWA learned as a consequence of positive factors such as the OLL team, action research, individual learning, and distributed leadership. Also, it learned as a result of several crises and unpopular mandated external reviews. In spite of the evidence of organizational learning, there existed many factors that inhibited organizational learning. Being aware of these inhibiting factors helped the OLL team and other organizational members to overcome them; however, solutions were sometimes elusive. As researchers and practitioners continue to develop better understandings of the processes and factors that influence organizational learning, some of these solutions will become apparent.

## REFERENCES

Argyris, C. (1992). *On organizational learning*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Argyris, C. & Schon, D. (1978). *Organizational Learning: A theory of action perspective*. Bon Mills, Ont.: Addison-Wesley.

Argyris, C., Schön, D. A. (1991). Participatory action research and action science compared: A commentary. In Whyte, W. F. (Ed.), *Participatory action research* (pp. 85-96). Newbury Park, Sage Publications.

Daft, R. & Huber, G. (1987). How organizations learn. In N. DiTomaso & S. Bacharach (Eds.), *Research in sociology of organizations*. Volume 5. Greenwich: JAI Press.

Darling-Hammond, L., Cobb, V., & Bullmaster, M. (1998). Professional development schools as contexts for teacher learning and leadership. In K. Leithwood & K.S. Louis (Eds.), *Organizational Learning in Schools*. The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Deal, T. & Peterson, K. (1999). *Shaping school culture: The heart of leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dibella, A. J., Nevis, E. C., & Gould, J. M. (1996). Understanding organizational learning capacity. *Journal of Management Studies, 33*(3), 361-379.

Fiol, M. & Lyles, M. (1985). Organizational learning. *Academy of Management Review*, 10, 803-813.

Edmonson, A. & Moingeon, B. (Eds.). (1996). *Organizational learning and competitive advantage*. London: Sage.

Elden, M., Levin, M. (1991). Cogenerative Learning: Bringing participation into action research. In Whyte, W. F. (Ed.), *Participatory action research* (pp. 127-142). Newbury Park, Sage Publications.

Fullan, M. (1995). The school as a learning organization: Distant dreams. *Theory into Practice, 34*(4), 230-235.

Fullan, M. (1999). *Change forces: The sequel*. London: Falmer Press.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Hargreaves, A. & Evans, R. (1997). Teachers and educational reform. In A. Hargreaves & R. Evans (Eds.), *Beyond educational reform: Bringing teachers back in* (pp.1-18). Philidelphia: Open University Press.

Hendry, C. (1996). Understanding and creating whole organizational change through learning theory. *Human Relations*, 49 (5), 621-641.

Janis, I.L. (1982). *Groupthink*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Kozma, R. & Schank, P. (1998). Connecting with the 21st Century: Technology in support of educational reform. *ASCD Yearbook: Learning with technology*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Lambert, L., Collay, M., Dietz, M.E., Kent, K., & Richert, A.E. (1996). *Who will save our schools? Teachers as constructivist leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Lant, T. & Mezias, S. (1996). An organization learning model of convergence and reorientation. In M. D. Cohen & L. G. Sproull (Eds.), *Organizational Learning*, (pp. 267-301). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Leithwood, K. (1994). Leadership for school restructuring. *Educational Administration Quarterly*,30(4), 498-518.

Leithwood , K. & Duke, D. (1999). A century's quest to understand school leadership. In J. Murphy & K.S. Louis (Eds.). *Handbook of research on educational administration*. New York: Longman.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing leadership for changing times*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Leithwood, K., Leonard, L., Sharratt, L. (1997, January). *Conditions fostering organizational learning in schools*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement, Memphis, Tennessee.

Leithwood, K. & Louis, K.S. (Eds.). (1998). *Organizational Learning in Schools*. The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Leithwood, K., Steinbach, R., Ryan, S., & Jantzi, D. (1997, March). *Team Learning in Secondary Schools*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Louis, K.S. (1994). Beyond 'managed change': Rethinking how schools improve. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 5(1), 2-24.

Martella, R., Nelson, R., & Marchand-Martella, N. (1999). *Research Methods*. Toronto: Allyn & Bacon.

Miles, M. & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B., & Lampel, J. (1998). *Strategy safari: A guided tour through the wilds of strategic management*. New York: The Free Press.

O'Toole, J. (1996). *Leading Change*. Toronto: Jossey-Bass.

Potter, W. (1996). *An analysis of thinking and research about qualitative methods*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Sarason, S.B. (1998). *Political leadership and educational failure*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E. (1996). Three cultures of management: The key to organizational learning. *Sloan Management Review, 38*(1), 9-20.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline*. New York: Doubleday.

Senge, P., Roberts, C, Ross, R, Smith, B., Kleiner, A. (1994). The fifth discipline fieldbook Toronto: Doubleday.

Sheppard, B. & Brown, J. (2000). The transformation of secondary schools into learning organizations. In K. Leithwood (Ed.), Understanding schools as intelligent systems (pp. 293-314). Stamford, CT: JAI Press.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273-285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Whyte, W. F., Greenwood, D. J., & Lazes, P. (1991). Participatory action research: Through practice to science in social research. In Whyte, W. F. (Ed.), *Participatory action research* (pp. 19-55). Newbury Park, Sage Publications.

## Table 1: Interview Data Summary

| Indicator | Response |
|---|---|
| Perceptions of Morale | 53% viewed morale to be low |
| | 35% viewed morale to be improved |
| | 6% viewed morale to be high |
| | 6% viewed morale to be in a constant state of flux |
| Change in Morale since OLL Team | 47% perceived no change in morale |
| | 53% perceived it to be higher than it has been in the past |
| Job security | 41% felt that they have little job security |
| | 53% felt secure in their job |
| Training Opportunities | 83% perceived training opportunities positively |
| | 12% did not feel that training opportunities were available to them |
| Input into training | 35% felt that they have no input |
| | 29% felt that they have input, but that it is limited |
| | 29% felt that they have input |
| Efficacy | 82% felt valued |
| | 18% did not feel valued |
| Perceived Purpose | 6% perceived that security is currently the primary purpose |
| | 29% perceived that rehabilitation is the primary purpose |
| | 59% perceived that both security and rehabilitation are promoted |
| Personal Preferences for Organizational Purpose | 23% felt that there should be more emphasis on security |
| | 47% felt there should be more emphasis on rehabilitation |
| | 24% felt that emphasis should be on both |
| Communication | 82% felt that communication throughout the organization has improved |
| | 18% felt that there has been no improvement |
| Dialogue (value of input) | 53% noted that input from all groups was valued equally |
| | 24% felt that input from social workers was given more weight |
| | 6% felt that teachers had more weight |
| | 12% felt that opinions were valued on an individual basis, with some people's opinions more highly valued than others |
| Source of Change | 82% felt that change resulted from a combination of inside and outside sources |
| Responsibility to School | 41% did not feel responsible for the whole School |
| | 47% felt responsible for the entire School |
| Encouraged to suggest Improvements | 29% indicated that they did not feel encouraged to suggest |
| | 18% indicated that they were not encouraged, but did it anyway |
| | 47% indicated that they felt encouraged to make suggestions |
| Impact of OLL Team on Personal Learning | 59% perceived no impact |
| | 24% perceived an impact |
| Impact of OLL Team on the organization | 12% perceived little or no impact and were negative toward the prospects |
| | 65% perceived some impact and were optimistic regarding prospects |
| | 24% perceived impact and point to examples of that impact |

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

**Table 2: Sources of Leadership**

| Role | Disagree | Somewhat | Agree |
|---|---|---|---|
| Administrator | 26% | 39% | 34% |
| Assistant Administrator | 29% | 34% | 37% |
| Counselling Supervisor | 15% | 33% | 52% |
| Teacher Head | 41% | 37% | 23% |
| Social Work Supervisor | 35% | 44% | 20% |
| Nursing Staff | 30% | 48% | 21% |
| Counsellors | 7% | 20% | 72% |
| Teachers | 12% | 33% | 55% |
| Food Services Staff | 38% | 33% | 23% |
| Social Workers | 10% | 30% | 60% |
| OLL Team | 21% | 42% | 34% |
| Individual Staff Members | 16% | 31% | 52% |
| Whole Staff | 15% | 46% | 39% |
| Students | 36% | 46% | 13% |
| Unions and/or Professional Associations | 27% | 38% | 33% |
| Headquarters | 52% | 29% | 15% |
| Government | 57% | 21% | 15% |
| Parents and/or Other Community Members | 50% | 21% | 13% |

**Table 3: Perceived Inhibitors of Organizational Learning**

| |
|---|
| The need to define the concept of success and the measures needed to address the concept. |
| Communication is an issue that covers all aspects of the organization form the micro to the macro level. Issues discussed ranged from the need to have an efficient flow of information concerning individual students, to access to the content of the studies completed, to simply having efficient tools such as voice mail to promote contact with community partners. |
| Need to focus on the students' needs as opposed to needs of the staff groups. |
| Need for improved data collection. This item was associated with both communication and evaluation. |
| Time and resources. . . . This concept was raised in relation to the magnitude of the job facing staff and the reduction of the staff required to perform the job. |
| Need to develop a basic understanding of the mandate of headquarters. Also, there is a need to educate headquarters about the program and services offered at the school. |
| Need to develop a strategic plan to promote the school. |
| Trust. . . . This issue was a very important topic. Issues discussed related to the lack of trust that existed between the frontline staff and management on the local level; and it was made clear that there existed a more permanent lack of faith in the intentions and mandate of the management staff at headquarters. |
| Division in staff. . . . There is a general recognition that staff must debate their current roles and work as a team to achieve cooperation in changing the organization. |
| Job security. . . . Concerns in relation to job security inhibit the staff in terms of team building. |
| It is important for staff to have a clear understanding of each others roles. We should respect the expertise brought to the table by each stakeholder. |
| Policy needs to be reviewed for the purpose of establishing short precise policy statements. |
| Morale. . . . This was a very heated discussion touching on issues as to who is responsible for morale and if poor morale inhibits the enhancement of position responsibilities. |

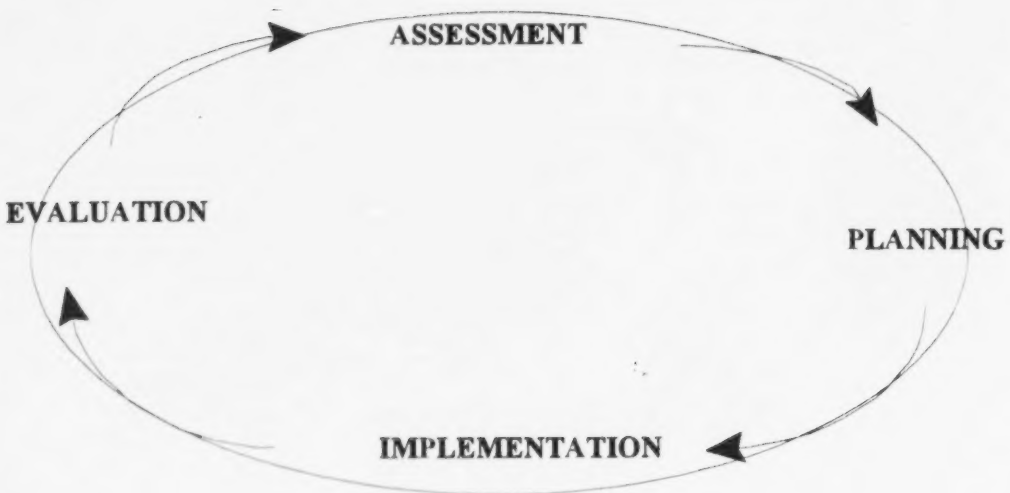


**Figure 1: Action Research Cycle**

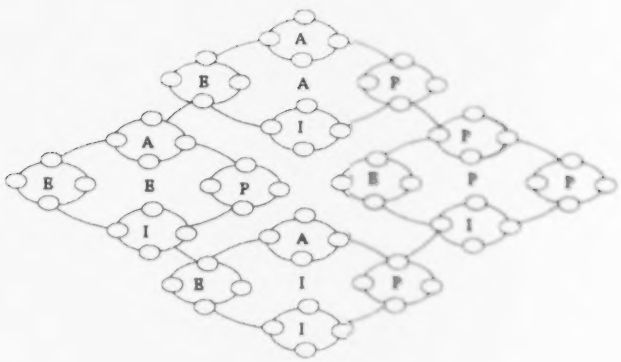


**Figure 2: Multiple Cycles of Action Research**